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The Importance of the Christian Faith illustrated in
the Explanation of St. Paul's Wish of being ac-
cursed for his Brethren.

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the
UNIVERSITY
OF
OXFORD,

On Sunday, January 26. 1752.

By WILLIAM DODWELL D.D.
Rector of Shottesbrook, Berks, and Prebendary
of Sarum.

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subject for the Bible

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ROM. ix. 3.

*I could wish that Myself were accursed
from Christ for my Brethren, my Kins-
men according to the Flesh.*

AN extraordinary Kind of Wish in all Appearance this! and such an one, as at first Sight, We scarce perhaps know how to reconcile to the Apostolical Character. It may be of some Use to ascertain the *Sense* of this Passage, before We proceed to consider the important *End* which He had in View in this warm and singular Expression.

For does it not seem, according to the obvious Sense of the Words, to import, as if *St. Paul* could wish Himself in the Condition of the *accursed from Christ*, in the sad State of those who were finally separated from their Saviour, provided He could thereby answer the Purpose He was speaking of; which was indeed the *Conversion* of his Jewish Brethren? But now could a reasonable Creature, a Christian, an Apostle, make such an unaccountable Wish as this? Is it barely possible that a *Thinking Being* could thus contradict the Instinct of Nature, and the Dictate of Reason (Both which teach the Desire of Self-

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Preservation and Happiness) and wish Himself *for ever miserable*, upon any End or View whatsoever? Does not Religion apply its Motives to this our innate Desire of Felicity, and continually represent the Importance of our Duty to our own Welfare? Does not that very Precept, which teaches us *to love our Neighbours as Ourselves*, proceed upon the Supposition of our bearing necessarily a *strong Love to Ourselves*, and at the same Time imply the *Reasonableness* of our doing so, and the Impossibility, upon the whole, of our loving Others better than Ourselves? 'Tis true, the Believers of the *Christian* Doctrine may, and Many of its first Professors actually did, arrive at so Heroick a Pitch of Virtue, as to disregard all the Interests of *this Life* for the Sake of doing Good to Others, and to sacrifice *Life itself* for the Conversion even of their Persecutors. But the Reason of all this was, because the Exchange proved to their own Advantage. *Futurity* yielded them a glorious Prospect, and all their Sufferings led them sooner to final Happiness. Whereas the being *Accursed from Christ* is a State that affords Nothing but an Expectation of *endless Horror*, and what No Man can seriously and premeditatedly *wish to Himself*, however rashly He may proceed, through the Violence of present Temptations, in the Path that leads to it.

But if the Absurdity and Impossibility of this had not been so open and flagrant in itself, yet the Apostle had Himself in this very Discourse *disclaimed* the Thought in the strongest Terms in which

which He could well express it. But three Verses before He had been declaring, that Nothing of any Kind should or could move Him from his *Love of and Hope in Christ*. The Importance of the Subject seems to elevate his Stile, and We feel the Force and Weight of his Sentiment, whilst We read it. He sets forth very rhetorically the victorious Efficacy of the *Love of Christ*, where it prevails in Sincerity, and describes its Influence on *Himself* and each *true Believer* in these triumphant Expressions. *Who shall separate Us from the Love of Christ? Shall Tribulation, or Distress, or Persecution, or Famine, or Nakedness, or Peril, or Sword? (As it is written, For thy Sake We are killed all the Day long; We are accounted as Sheep for the Slaughter) Nay in all these Things We are more than Conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am perswaded, that neither Death, nor Life, nor Angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor Things present, nor Things to come, nor Height, nor Depth, nor any other Creature, shall be able to separate Us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* After this advantageous Account of the powerful Support of this Principle in *Himself* and his *Believing Brethren*, He next turns his Thoughts to the Case of those who were as yet *destitute* of the Christian Faith and Hope, expresses his deep Concern for them, and earnest Zeal and Desire, that They might see in the same Light the *Importance*, the *Necessity* of this only saving Religion. *I say the Truth in Christ, I lie not, my Con-*
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science also bearing me Witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great Heaviness and continual Sorrow in my Heart. For I could wish that Myself were accursed from Christ for my Brethren, my Kinsmen according to the Flesh. The very Point in which He was so solicitous about them, was, that They might *know the Love of Christ that passeth Knowledge*, from which He had, in the same Breath as it were, declared that Nothing could possibly draw *Him*. He cannot therefore be supposed in the same Instant to reverse his own well-grounded Opinion, contradict Himself, and *wish Himself* for ever separated from the only desirable Hope and Comfort of Existence.

But what was then the true Meaning of this singular Expression, remains to be considered. Now the first Word of this remarkable Sentence is in the Original capable of a different Translation. The first and most natural Version of the Verb *ἤχόμην* without looking into Critical Reasons for a different Construction, would be, *I did wish Myself accursed from Christ for my Brethren, my Kinsmen according to the Flesh.* This must be supposed to relate to his *former Manner of Life amongst the Jews* before his Conversion, when, through Attachment to the Customs and Opinions of his own Nation, He became the most zealous *Persecutor* and unwearied *Enemy* of Christianity. This Interpretation cuts off all Appearance of any Exception, and thus several of the primitive Writers translate this Passage and solve the Difficulty. The *Vulgar Latin* in particular

cular thus decides the Point by fixing this Translation, and it has also the Authority of some of the *Greek Fathers*. This Version apparently agrees with the *History* of this Apostle, and gives Sense to the Words of his Declaration, and might well be allowed as the proper Answer to the Enquiry, if a very fair and rational Solution could not be offered according to the present Translation. The only Objection to this Construction is, not the Want of *Truth*, or of *Sense* in the Sentence itself, but its Relation to the *Context*, with which it does not so well accord as the *common* Acceptation of the *Text*. The Apostle is ushering in something very important by a very solemn Preface, and which particularly points to the *present* State and Condition of his Mind. *I say the Truth in Christ, I lie not, my Conscience also bearing me Witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great Heaviness and continual Sorrow in my Heart.* Now after this awakening Introduction it would be cold, and languid, and little extraordinary, or suitable to this preparatory Asseveration and Concern, to say, whilst I was a *Jew*, I wished Myself to be *accursed from Christ for my Brethrens Sake*. 'Tis true, if He was speaking only with Relation to *Himself*, He might be sorry enough for this afterwards, when He was better instructed, that He had before persecuted the Truth; but the *Context* directs Us to consider his *continual Sorrow and Heaviness* to be not on *his own* Account but on that of his *Brethren*, on Account of their *present* Blindness and Hardness
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of Heart, not his *former* Ignorance and Errors, which He had now renounced. He goes on in the remaining Part of the Chapter, to speak of the Infatuation and Rejection of the *Jews*, which He heavily laments; and it seems therefore most suitable both to the preceding and subsequent Passages, to understand this earnest Ejaculation as a Wish of somewhat which He could *now* submit to for their Conversion and Salvation. Let us suppose therefore the present Translation to be the right and true one, *I could wish that Myself were accursed from Christ for my Brethren, my Kinsmen according to the Flesh*. This Sense All allow the Words, through the supposed Omission of a Particle, to be capable of, The best Criticks approve of this as the most eligible Translation, and several parallel Passages are brought to confirm it.

And why may it not be justifiable even according to the *strictest* Form and most *literal* Meaning of it? For the Apostle does not say, *I do wish to be accursed from Christ*, but *I could wish it*, Meaning plainly, if it were *possible*, if it were *allowable*, if it could be *effectual* to the Purpose designed. The Apostle knew well enough that neither of these Conditions attended the Thing He spoke of, and the very *Manner* of his speaking shews that He did know it; otherwise He would have expressed his Wish clearly and absolutely, and not have put in a bare *potential* Inclination of doing or suffering something of Importance for their Service. We use the
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same Kind of Phrase every Day in our common Conversation, and No One finds a Difficulty in understanding or explaining it. When We say We *could wish* to do this or that for the Sake of any Persons, We plainly mean that in Fact We cannot do the Thing itself, but that it is our sincere Desire to promote, almost in any Method, their Interest and Advantage. In this Interpretation We do not go so far as a *rhretorical Figure* for our Refuge, but the *Letter* itself is sufficiently justifiable. St. Paul says He *could wish to be accursed from Christ for the Sake of his Brethren*, that is, if such a Thing had been within the Possibility of a rational Creature's Wish, or could possibly have answered the End proposed by it. The very Expression that He *could do it*, implies that some *Limitations* are to be understood, and such 'a Method of speaking points out to every intelligent Hearer the farther Signification of it. And as this is the most *natural and obvious* Sense in itself, so it best answers its Place in the *Context*. This comes up to the Pomp of the foregoing Expressions, and the Importance of the solemn Asseverations with which it is introduced. It is a Continuation of the very same Notion and Argument which He had been insisting on before. After having declared, that no Consideration, present or future, should separate Him from the sure Foundation of Hope in the *Mercy and Love of Christ*, He proceeds to apply this Doctrine to his Regard for *Those*, whose Religion He had formerly vindicated, but had now forsaken,
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and makes his Appeal to his Redeemer and Sanctifier for the *Sincerity* of his ensuing Declaration, that their *Conversion* lay deeply at his Heart; that his *Grief* for their Blindness somewhat ballanced his own *Joy in Believing*, and that this, if any thing, might have prevailed with Him to have renounced his own Share in the Benefits of the general Redemption. If it could have been done at all (which He had before declared it could not, and which the first Reflection on the Reason of the Thing would easily confirm, yet if it had been possible at all) He could have submitted to it for this End sooner than any other, and *could have wished Himself accursed from Christ for his Brethren, his Kinsmen according to the Flesh.* The *Occasion* of this warm Ejaculation, and the very *Form* of the *Phrase* so clearly point out this plain and justifiable Sense of it, that it may seem unnecessary to mention any other.

But Suppose that the Expression had not been so *limited* and *confined*, but the Wish had been more positive and absolute, the Answer to it, and Solution of it would then have been, that it was a plain *Hyperbole*, and must be understood as such. *Figurative* Expressions are frequently used in Scripture, and this particular Figure is exemplified in several Instances. When St. *John* said that He *supposed that if all that Jesus had done, should be written, the World itself could not contain the Books that should be written*, He plainly meant to signify this, and no more, that such Writings would be extremely numerous. This Method of

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expressing the highest *conceivable* Degree of any Thing, by stating the Case beyond all Degree of *Possibility*, is familiar and well known, and has its particular Name and Signification assigned to it. The Truth in this Case lies not in the *Letter*, but in the *Idea* intended to be conveyed by it, and that is as determinate and as defensible in this Instance, as in any other. The same Custom and general Agreement, which has given Sense to *Words* (which They have not naturally in themselves) has likewise given Sense to *whole Phrases* and Forms of Speaking; and whilst they are used according to their customary Signification, without being applied to any Purpose of *Fraud* or *Deceit*, they are entirely justifiable. This Remark is particularly applicable to such *Hyperbolical* Expressions, because these can never be used to *deceive*, as being framed in a Style exceeding all real Degree of Belief, and intended only to raise our Apprehensions to a very high Notion of all that is *possible* in the Instances spoken of. This occasions no Doubt in *verbal* Interchange, nor in *human* Writings, and therefore should not in those which are *inspired*.

There is another Interpretation of these Words, which is approved by the greater Part of Commentators, though it seems indeed less probable than any of those before assigned. They observe that the *being accursed*, or *Anathema*, does throughout the Old Testament, in the Version of the LXX, signify the being *devoted to Destruction*, and therefore suppose that St. Paul only

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meant, that He could wish to be thus *devoted* for their Sake, and could be willing to suffer any *temporal* Punishment, to contribute to their *spiritual* Salvation. And had the Words been only that He *could wish to be accursed for his Brethren, his Kinsmen*, This would clearly have been the Sense of them, that He would contentedly have undergone any *temporal* Sufferings to be the Instrument of preserving them from *eternal* Ruin. But the being *accursed from Christ* must be understood according to the Stile of the *New Testament*, and can mean Nothing less than a *total Forfeiture* of the Benefits of the Gospel, or final Destruction itself. The Interpreters omit the *principal* Circumstance in the Wish, and take away at once both the *Spirit* and the *Letter* of it.

Others again have observed that *extraordinary Judgments* and temporal Punishments attended *Excommunication* in the first Ages of the Church, and have supposed that St. *Paul* might wish Himself obnoxious to these, to do his Jewish Brethren any Service. They construe the being *accursed from Christ* as being cut off by a judicial Sentence from the *Christian Church*, and by his Readiness to submit to it, They understand his Willingness to bear the present Consequence of it, through a Hope of the Sentence itself being finally reversed by his Redeemer. But This is multiplying Figures without End and without Reason. It is putting a *Part* for the *Whole*, and the *Effect* for the *Cause*. It is contradicting the obvious Sense of the Expression, and amounts in the

the Conclusion to a Wish of being *accursed from Christ*, in order to be reconciled to and saved by Him.

Others have supposed, that by this Wish of being *accursed from Christ*, He meant that He should be willing to be *disesteemed* as such, and to bear the Ignominy of such a Condition to promote the Salvation of the Jews. But if This had been the Meaning, it had been very easy for the Apostle to have expressed it clearly, and by putting in a Particle of *Similitude* to have prevented the Possibility of any Misconstruction. It had likewise been little extraordinary in itself, or answerable to the Occasion and Manner in which it is introduced; and it had been the least *suitable Image* which he could have presented to their Thoughts, to imagine that He could promote their *Conversion* by the *Loss* of his *Reputation*. Whereas the Giving up the Salvation of *One* to promote that of *Thousands*, if it had been possible in itself, as confessedly it was not, was yet a Thought of Dignity and Importance, and equal to the highest Professions and Expectations.

There is One farther Interpretation of this Passage deserving of Notice (though new and singular) as plausible in itself, and as coming from the Hand of a very pious and learned Person, who has happily illustrated many other Passages of Scripture, whether He has equally succeeded in this Particular or not. He lays the Difficulty entirely in our translating it *accursed from Christ*, whereas the Particle so translated, it is said, may
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as well be rendered *after Christ*, that is, after the Example of Christ; and then the Sense would be, that He could be content, nay could rejoice, to suffer even to *Crucifixion*, which was an *accursed* Death, as his Blessed Master had done before Him, to promote their Repentance and Salvation. This would be *Sense*, would be very *pertinent* and *weighty Sense*, and would every way suit the *Context*. The only Thing wanting is some competent *Authority* for this Manner of translating it. But I do not find that this Particle *ἀπὸ* will bear this Sense. The only parallel Passage offered to confirm it is 2 *Tim.* 1. 3. where the Apostle says, *I thank God, whom I serve ἀπὸ πατέρων, from my Forefathers*, which, it is said, signifies *after my Forefathers*, or as They have done before me; and that therefore the same Particle may as well be rendered and interpreted so in this Place. But besides that a *single* Instance, if it would bear the strictest Examination, ought with Caution to be urged against the known and fixed Sense of a Word in other Authors, besides this, it does not at all appear that the Instance referred to comes up to the Point, but that it is very rightly translated, as it stands in our Version, *whom I serve from my Forefathers*. The Expression is short, and several Conjectures may be passed on the Design of it. The Apostle might mean no more than that He had ever served God to the best of his Knowledge from his *earliest Days*, and the first Instructions received from those who had the Care of his Education :

tion : in which Case, though He might be said indeed to do this *after his Forefathers*, yet their *Example* is not the Point in View offered in *that Text*. But upon a careful Review of the Passage I am perswaded that their *Pattern* is so far from being the Consideration proposed in it, that it was rather intended in *direct Opposition* to them, and that the Mention of his *serving God from his Forefathers* was designed to refer to the *different Method from them* in which He served Him. To this agree the Truth of the *Fact* and the Sense of the *Context*. He had left the Religion of his *Ancestors*, and was propagating a new one, which was to supersede the other ; He speaks particularly in the *present Tense*, and with a View to his *present Faith*, as the *Context* undeniably shews. He does not say, I *did* serve God *from my Forefathers*, but I *do* serve Him, and yet We know He did not *at this Time* serve Him *after their Example* or Method of Worship, but in *professed Opposition* to it. Every Term that He uses in this Sentence, and the Purport of the Whole of it, confirms this Sense of it. I *serve* God, says He, *ἀπὸ πατέρων* *from my Forefathers*, that is, differently from them, *with a pure Conscience*, referring herein either to his *Sincerity* in his remarkable *Conversion* from a Religion, which He had patronized so earnestly to One that He had so zealously persecuted ; or to the higher and more uncorrupted *Light*, with which He was illuminated under the Gospel ; for it has been observed that He never speaks of or allows the Notion of

a *pure Conscience* out of the Pale of Christianity. Besides, the very Mention of his *Forefathers*, which, according to the usual Interpretation of it, seems *foreign* and *ill-connected* with the Substance of the Discourse, yet bears a particular Propriety, if understood to express the *different* Manner of his Worship from theirs. He is addressing Himself to *Timothy*, who had had the Happiness of being educated from his Infancy in the true Faith, and the Apostle refers particularly to that Consideration. If therefore We suppose this Mention of his own Ancestors to be by Way of *Antithesis* to that happy Circumstance of which He reminds *Timothy*, who had sucked in Truth with the first Sentiments that He had imbibed, then the whole Admonition is rational and consistent, and the Sense of it will run thus.

“I, who had the Prejudices of Education to overcome, and was called on to testify my *Sincerity* by resigning all my Prepossessions to the clear Conviction of Truth, and serving God in a Way *different from my Forefathers*, am thankful in my Devotions for thy more fortunate Lot, and long to enjoy the mutual Benefit of it in Conversation, when I consider that thy Faith is long-grounded and deep-rooted, coeval with thyself, derived to thee from the Piety and true Belief of thy *Grandmother Lois*, and thy *Mother Eunice*, which gives me sure Confidence in thy Perseverance.” This appears to be the true Meaning of St. *Paul* in this Place; from whence We may conclude that the Particle

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translated *from* does not here signify *after the Example of*, but the direct contrary; and if not in this Place, then it is not pretended in any other.

Upon the Whole therefore, the most obvious and *literal* Sense of my *Text* seems upon all Accounts most to be preferred; that the Apostle could have resigned every the nearest and dearest Interest of his own, even to his most valuable Hope in Christ, if that had been possible or allowable, (which his very Expression shewed to be otherwise) in order to promote the *Conversion* of the whole Jewish Nation, and to make them sensible of the Privileges offered to them in this Holy Faith and only Scheme of Salvation.

But it is high Time, from these Reflections on the *Manner* of the Apostle's *Expression*, to proceed to the Substance of what He intended by it, and to offer some Observations on the *End* which he had so solicitously in View in this warm Expression of his Concern for his Jewish Brethren. Something of the utmost Consequence We might conclude from the *Manner* in which He speaks; and the *Context* shews it to be no less than their Conversion to the Religion which He was then commissioned to preach. And in this We see his Notion of the *Importance* of the Christian Faith. He thought the being *accursed from Christ* the most dreadful Thing that could be mentioned; and he thought it fit to be mentioned only to shew Others the Horror of it, and as the Means of preserving them from it. He introduces it as the utmost Calamity that could be
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endured, and as the highest Method in which He could express his Desire, that his Brethren of the *Jewish* Nation might see and consider it in the same Light.

But whence, it may be asked, all this mighty Zeal in this Matter? whence this vehement Desire to establish one Form of Belief in Preference to another? Are not All equally secure, who live up to the Light that They are favoured with? More especially why was this Matter pressed so strongly on the *Jews* in particular? Were not They sufficiently safe already in the Dispensation, which They then enjoyed? Were They not already in a *State of Covenant* with God? Did They not profess and obey a Religion, which We All allow to be founded on a Divine Revelation? Were not They *Israelites*, to whom, as the Apostle expresses it in the Verse following the *Text*, pertained the *Adoption*, and the *Glory*, and the *Covenants*, and the *Giving of the Law*, and the *Service of God*, and the *Promises*? Whence then this great *Heaviness* and continual *Sorrow* in the *Apostle's Heart*, so emphatically expressed, so frequently repeated on their Account? May it not be inferred from the Justice and Goodness of God, that All who are *sincere* in their Profession, will be accepted by Him? And may it not be farther urged in their Favour, that They did indeed serve Him in the Method of his own Institution? Why then was *St. Paul* so uneasy on their Account, as if they were cut off from all Hope, and were out of the Way of
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Salvation; when they could not only plead that They acted according to their *real Perswasion*, but could likewise give undoubted Proofs of the Truth of their Religion, and that they *knew* indeed that *God had spoken unto Moses*, though they were not so well satisfied of the like Pretensions of Any Other?

As plausible as these Interrogatories may sound, and as much Weight as they are now thought to deserve, yet from the whole Scope of *St. Paul's* Writings, from the frequent and warm Expressions of his Concern for the *Conversion* of his Jewish Brethren We may infer that He knew and considered these Pleas, and judged them insufficient. He had Himself been a *Convert*, and could have made such Apologies with uncommon Force, as are founded on *Sincerity* of Opinion, on suitable *Regularity* of Life, and on the *Divine Original* of the Dispensation which He then professed. Yet He seems almost at a Loss for Terms of sufficient Contempt, when He is speaking of this Subject; He reproaches Himself with Bitterness for what He had done in Pursuance of those Principles: After the most rhetorical Illustration of the Prerogatives of the Jewish Dispensation He stiles them *but Dung in Comparison of the Knowledge of Christ*, and even sets the *Jews*, who rejected this superior Light when it was offered to them, on a Level with the *Heathens*, as to a Title to Salvation. And unless We think Ourselves at Liberty to compose a new Religion for Ourselves, and to alter the Terms on which

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the Gospel is proposed to our Assent, We must continue to preach the same Doctrine with St. *Paul*, to press the actual Belief of Christianity as the indispensable Condition of Salvation, and to shew our Charity not by *flattering* Men with Security in their Errors, but by endeavouring to *detect* them, and to convince them of the Privileges, which are inseparably annexed to the Profession of the Truth.

If the Gospel be true, it cannot be a Matter of Indifference, whether We think it false, or not. It is proposed to our Assent under the strongest Sanctions, no less than a Promise of Acceptance and Reward to the faithful Acknowledgment of it, and the Threatning of final Misery to the final Disbelief of it. If indeed this Religion be itself groundless, then this Terror is vain, and there can be no Danger in rejecting it; but it is an amazing *Inconsistency* to own the *Truth* of Christianity, and to disregard the *Importance* of it in this Light, or to think favourably of the State of those who set aside the Evidence of it. --- Let Us briefly reflect on the *Truth* and the *Equity* of this Representation of the Necessity of our Faith.

We need not rest on a *single* Expression, as extraordinary as is this in the *Text*, nor on the Testimony of a *single* Apostle, as peculiarly as his Case was circumstanced, to prove the Truth of this Representation, to evince the Necessity of embracing the Christian Faith as the indispensable Condition of Salvation. His *Zeal* was but a
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Transcript of the Nature of the Doctrine which his Master had taught, and of the Sanctions with which He had enforced it. Our Blessed Lord certainly understood the Nature of his own Religion, and of the Consequences of embracing or rejecting it; and He Himself preached it in this Manner, not as a Point which They might listen to or not, might embrace or not, as it suited with their Prepossession or Inclinations, but as a Matter, which required their Attention and Assent, and on the Reception of which depended their Title to the Favour and Acceptance of their Maker. In a private Conference with *Nicodemus*, this was his Account of the Intent of his Incarnation, and the Substance of his Doctrine; *that God so loved the World that He gave his only begotten Son, that Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting Life. For God, says He, sent not his Son into the World to condemn the World; but that the World through Him might be saved.* And then He limits the Benefits of his Coming more expressly to them only who received his Pretensions. *He that believeth on Him, is not condemned; but He that believeth not, is condemned already, because He hath not believed in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God.* John 3. 16, 17, 18. To the gainsaying *Jews* He says expressly, *If Ye believe not that I am He, Ye shall die in your Sins.* His own Disciples He assured, *that No One could come to the Father but by Him.* John 14. 16. And He had so fully and frequently represented this to them, that even *John the Baptist*

Baptist gave this Account of it on Oceaſion of a Question between ſome of his Diſciples and the Jews. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlaſting Life: and He that believeth not the Son, ſhall not ſee Life; but the Wrath of God abideth on Him.* John 3. 36. When He ſent them out in his Life Time to preach Him and his Religion, He authorized them to do it with this Declaration, that it ſhould be *more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for thoſe Cities,* which ſhould reſuſe to receive them and their Doctrines. Matt. 10. 15. After his Reſurrection This was the Commiſſion given to the Apoſtles, this the Sanction with which it was enforced. *He ſaid unto them, Go Ye into all the World, and preach the Goſpel to every Creature. He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved: but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.* Mark 16. 16.

It may ſeem of leſs Weight to cite the Authority of the *Diſciples* after that of their *Maſter*, yet let Us obſerve that They deviated not from the Terms of their Commiſſion, but uniformly preſſed the Truth of Chriſtianity, as a Truth neceſſary to be believed and profeſſed. St. *Peter* declares expreſſly to the Jews, whoſe were all the forementioned Privileges, and who triumphed not a little in them, that *there is not Salvation in any other than in Jeſus Chriſt; for that there is none other Name under Heaven given among Men, whereby We muſt be ſaved.* Acts 4. 12. And in his firſt Epiſtle He ſpeaks of this Salvation as extending

tending only to those who upon the Publication of it embraced and believed it. *Ye know*, says He to the dispersed Converts, *that Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as Silver and Gold, from your vain Conversation received by Tradition from your Fathers; But with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without Blemish and without Spot: Who verily was fore-ordained before the Foundation of the World, but was manifest in these last Times for You; Who by him do believe in God that raised Him up from the Dead, and gave Him Glory, that your Faith and Hope might be in God.* 1 Pet. i. 18 &c.

Thus to Friends and Enemies did They equally represent this Faith as the only Foundation of Security; and having thus confirmed it by other Authority, and that of the very highest Sort, We may now resume the Testimony of this Apostle. He appeals to the *Ephesians*, that this had been his constant Doctrine; that He had testified both to the *Jews*, and also to the *Greeks*, Repentance toward God, and Faith toward our Lord *Jesus Christ*. Acts 20. 21. He omits not to inculcate this in any one of his Epistles. To the *Romans* He calls the Gospel the Power of God unto Salvation, to every one that believeth. Rom. i. 16. To the *Corinthians* He declares that other Foundation could no Man lay, than that is laid, which is *Jesus Christ*. 1 Cor. 3. 11. No Pretence of Natural Religion, or of the Discharge of Morality, or of Adherence to the Jewish Dispensation, which was confessedly of Divine Original, would be suffi-

sufficient to Salvation without *the Knowledge of Jesus Christ*, where his Gospel was proposed to Assent. With a View to some of these Pretences of the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature, or of the Mosaick Revelation, He adds to the Galatians, *If Any Man preach any other Gospel unto You, than that Ye have received, let Him be accursed.* Gal. 1. 9. Suitably He teaches the Ephesians, that they were *saved by Grace through Faith.* Ephes. 2. 8. and the Philippians in a Passage fore-cited, that He *counted* all the Privileges of the Law but *Loss* for the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. Phil. 3. 8. To the Colossians He places all the *Hope, which was laid up for them in Heaven*, to their having received the *Faith of Christ Jesus.* Col. 4. 5. To the Thessalonians He declares that the Lord Jesus should be *revealed from Heaven with his mighty Angels, in flaming Fire, taking Vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 2 Thess. 1. 7, 8. To Timothy He speaks of this as the only remaining Hope of Gainsayers, *if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth.* 2 Tim. 2. 25. And lastly in his Epistle to the Hebrews, He speaks in Terms of very high and dreadful Import, of the Case of those who rejected the Truth when it was proposed to them, or deserted it, after they had once embraced it. *It is impossible, says He, for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the holy Ghost, and*
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have tasted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come; If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame. Heb. 6. 4, 5, 6. And again, Let Us hold fast the Profession of our Faith without Wavering --- For if We sin wilfully after that We have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries. He that despised Moses Law, died without Mercy under two or three witnesses; Of how much sorer Punishment, suppose Ye, shall He be thought worthy, who hath trodden under Foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace? Heb. 10. 23 &c. St. James, though the whole Intent of his Epistle is practical, yet takes Care to conclude with this Proof of his Acknowledgment, that Salvation was only to be expected in the actual Belief and Profession of the Gospel. Brethren, If any of You do err from the Truth, and One convert him; let him know, that He which converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Way, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall hide a Multitude of Sins. Jam. 5. 19, 20. St. Jude directs all Christians to contend earnestly for the Faith, which was delivered unto the Saints, Jude 3. and herein to place their only Hope, looking for the Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal Life. 21. The Doctrine
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of St. John is suitable and consistent. *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the Witness in Himself; He that believeth not God, hath made Him a Liar, because He believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son. And this is the Record that God hath given to us eternal Life; and this Life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath Life; and He that hath not the Son of God, hath not Life.* 1 John 5. 10, 11, 12. And in the Book of Revelation He represents it as the immediate Voice of God from Heaven, that *Unbelievers* as well as *Immortal Persons*, shall have their Part in the Lake which burneth with Fire and Brimstone. Rev. 21. 8.

But Many will admit the *Truth* of this Representation, who are by no Means satisfied as to the *Equity* of it; nay who urge the Truth of this Representation as an Argument against the Truth of the Gospel; They will allow that it excludes all *Unbelievers* from a Title to Salvation, and threatens them with the severest Penalties; and from thence form an Objection against the Authority of this Revelation from the Nature of its Sanction.

Yet how much more strongly would the Objection have been urged, if the Case had been directly otherwise; and a new Religion had been proposed to their Assent, without any Pretence of their lying under any Obligation to receive it? How would They have *ridiculed* or *disregarded* a Dispensation, which the very Proposers of it had represented as a Matter indifferent, which They might

might embrace or reject, just as They pleased? Could They believe it possible that God Almighty should interpose supernaturally, and reveal a Religion from Heaven, and then leave it as a Point of no Consequence, whether his Creatures attended to and believed it or not? Could the Publishers of it have expected to make any Converts on this Principle? Or could They have adhered to it themselves, when Tortures and Torments threatned the Profession of it? Could They have faced Death in its most terrible Aspect, and submitted to unheard of Cruelties in Support of their Testimony, if They had been taught themselves, and were to teach Others, that the Favour and Approbation of their Maker did not depend on their having any Regard to the Revelation of his Doctrines and Precepts? The Absurdities of such a Supposition are so many and great, that it seems unnecessary to enlarge on them. If the Will of God be supposed to be revealed, it must be supposed to be of some Consequence to Men, whether They listen to it or not. If such Consequence be foretold, it is a Presumption of the Truth of the Pretensions, and very consistent with the Claim of a Divine Authority. It is farther a very proper Means of exciting Attention, and therein an Act of Mercy in not leaving Men to their own thoughtless Conduct without any Notice or Admonition of their Danger. When *St. Paul* expressed Himself in this Manner in the *Text*, the *unconverted Jews* could not but see his Notion of the Importance of the

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Point which He maintained, and that They were certainly ruined, if He was certainly in the Right. And surely This could not fail of having some Influence in awakening them to a serious Enquiry into the Foundation of what He taught.

Now the Scripture always *supposes* the Success of a diligent and impartial Enquiry into the Truth of Christianity, where the Evidence is fairly and fully proposed to the Enquirers, and therefore excludes at once those Objections which arise from the Pleas of *invincible Ignorance*, of the Necessity of the Assent of the Understanding following the *Appearance of Proofs*, and of the Pretence of *Sincerity*. The Condemnatory Sentences have no Relation to the Case of Those, who never heard of the Gospel, and therefore Men may harangue as long as They please on the Subject of not being accountable for Light, which was never enjoyed, without affecting the Equity of such solemn Sentences. The Case of Those who *sit in such utter Darknefs*, We have no Authority to determine, but must leave them to their only Hope, that of *uncovenanted Mercy*. We are concerned only to vindicate the Apostle's earnest Expression of the hopeless State of Those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who rejected the Gospel when it was proposed to them.

Now if We are at all accountable to our Maker for the Use of our Faculties, certainly in no Instance more, scarce in any so much, as in the Enquiry into the Truth of a Religion, which claims his great Name and sovereign Authority.

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The Will of God must be the supreme Concern of Man, and a total Inattention to such a Claim must be such a Degree of *Immorality* as None will presume to defend. And if the Evidence be so circumstanced, as to be neither precarious on the one Hand, nor irresistible on the other; if it may be evaded by careless and prejudiced Minds, and yet appears clear and satisfactory to every diligent and virtuous Enquirer, This is just what might be expected, what must be supposed in a *State of Probation*, and may therefore be considered as a Confirmation of the *Truth* of this Religion, as well as a Vindication of its *Sanctions*. Whilst One considers the various *Evidences* of the glorious Gospel of Christ with an attentive and unprejudiced Mind, One is apt to stand amazed at the Possibility of Infidelity; but when We look into the World, and observe the blinding Influences of Pride, of Lust, of Avarice, and other immoral Passions, our Astonishment subsides, and We see in Fact how much the Assent of the Understanding depends upon voluntary Conduct. The Case is no other with Respect to the *Belief* than to the *Practice* of Religion. Whilst We attend in like Manner to the *Enforcements* of our Duty, the like Astonishment arises, that Any, who really believe what They profess, can resolve knowingly to expose themselves to eternal Ruin for the Sake of any present Gratifications. But here again Experience shews, in Opposition to many plausible Speculations, how much the *Understanding* is at the Direction of the *Will*,
and

and how easily Men can bring themselves to choose the Paths to Destruction, though Demonstration may be brought (as they themselves acknowledge) of the Absurdity of such a Choice.

Now where can be the Want of Equity in either Case in charging Men with the Consequences of their own Conduct? If their Judgment of the Truth of a Revelation depends on the *free Exercise* of their Faculties, as in Reason and in Fact We see that it does, Are not the Passions that influence and blind them in this Instance as criminal (to say the lowest) as in any other? Shall the Great God proclaim his Will, and shall his Creatures be thought not accountable to Him for overlooking and despising it, through secular Cares, irregular Indulgencies, or vain Affectations of universal Knowledge and Self-Sufficiency; when a faithful diligent Enquiry would not have failed to have led them to the Discernment and Acknowledgment of the Truth? The God, who published to us the Scheme of our Redemption, and required our Assent to it, knew that He had so proportioned the Evidence as to convince every Lover of Truth and Virtue, and He has even enabled us to discern the same. He has given actual *Promises of Success* to Those, who truly desire to *know and do his Will*, and has pointed out the evil Dispositions which lead to Error and Unbelief. He has not therefore required of any one what is not in his Power, but He has required what is in every one's Power, that They faithfully apply themselves, without Prejudice

judice or Partiality, to the Means of Information, which He has afforded them, and this Method He has represented as leading certainly to that Faith which is required of them.

In this Light We see the just Ground of the Apostle's Concern and Uneasiness for the *unbelieving Jews*. Had the Gospel not been proposed to them, They had not been answerable for the Want of it. But the God, who had favoured them with some Degree of Light before, beyond the Rest of Mankind, now offered them a farther Share of that Favour, and They were not the less blameable, They were rather the more blameable, for rejecting this because of their former Privileges. Their Dispensation had typified both the Person, and Sufferings, and Doctrines of the Redeemer of Mankind; and besides all the other Evidences of the Truth of the Gospel, which were common to all Mankind, They had also the *more sure Word of Prophecy* to lead them to Christ. Those amongst them who continued *Unbelievers* with these Advantages, were guilty with great Aggravations, and fell under the Sentence of Condemnation as emphatically as any of the Gentiles, notwithstanding their Dispensation was originally founded on a Divine Revelation. For the same Authority, that at first established it, had now repealed it; or rather the Ceremonial Law having now answered the original Purpose of the Lawgiver, was thereby compleated, and the *Substance* being now in due Time given, the Use of the *Shadow* ceased of Course.

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But might They not plead, and may not Others at this Time plead, that the Evidence of Christianity does not appear satisfactory to them; that They are *sincere* in a contrary Perswasion, and cannot therefore have any thing so dreadful to fear, even though They should finally appear to be under a Mistake? The Solution which the Gospel directs Us to give to this Plea is, that it is founded on Ambiguity of Words, and an Error in Fact. The Reality of a *present Perswasion* ought not to be called by the Title of *Sincerity*; for it may be owing to Neglect or Partiality, to vicious Influences and criminal Prejudices. And it always is so, when it is advanced in Opposition to the Gospel, where the Grounds and Reasons of it are offered to Examination. It is much easier to conceive, that Men may deceive One Another, or even Themselves in such Pretences, than that the Word of God should fail, which has promised Success to an Honest Heart, and has afforded us such Evidence as has thrown Difficulties next to irresistible in the Way to Unbelief. We may therefore conclude in the happy Degree of Light which We enjoy, that real *Sincerity* will lead to true *Christianity*; and that *if Any Man faithfully desire to do the Will of God, He shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.*

There is One farther Observation to be offered on the *Nature* of the Doctrine of Christianity, which will shew the Connection of its *Truth* and *Importance*, and the great Danger of refusing it,
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in Case it was really given from Heaven. The Scripture has *concluded all under Sin*, has represented all as Transgressors of the Law of God, and of Course obnoxious to the Penalty of Transgression. It has revealed Us to Ourselves, as being born in a natural State of Corruption and of Displeasure, as being *Children of Wrath*, guilty of many actual Offences, indisposed to Good, and unable of Ourselves to attain to a *real*, and much less to a *compleat* Repentance and Reformation. It has shewn the Necessity of a *Mediator*, and pointed to the only sufficient One, and has made *Faith in his Blood* the only *covenanted* Title to Favour and Acceptance, even with the *Condition* of the best Degree of Holiness, which We are still capable of attaining. If therefore We believe not that *Christ is He*, the appointed Mediator between God and Men, *We shall die in our Sins*. We are left to our natural Condition of Disobedience and Punishment, and *the Wrath of God abideth on us*.

May the Conviction of this great Truth raise in us that Apostolical Spirit so warmly expressed in the *Text*, to contribute to the Conversion of Others, and to be ready either to do, or to suffer, if Occasion be, in the Service of that Cause. If We esteem our Religion in Proportion to its real Value, it must occasion *great Heaviness and continual Sorrow in our Hearts*, that Any should be blind to the only Foundation of Hope; more especially when, as *St. Paul* intimates, Those, to whom We have most Reason to wish well, choose

choose so ill for themselves, as to reject an Offer of Pardon and Happiness, and thereby destroy the only Foundation of Comfort in this World, or in the Prospect of Another. We must not for their Sakes attempt to new model the Scheme of our Religion, or contribute to betray them into final Ruin by so gross a Misrepresentation, as if it left Room for a favourable Opinion of their Condition. No: --- We must express our *Charity* for their Persons by our *Zeal* to establish them in this necessary Faith, must fairly represent *the Truth as it is in Jesus*, propose his Religion with his own awful Sanctions, and leave it to rest, in the Manner which He has authorized, on the Evidences with which He has enabled us to support it. And may God of his infinite Mercy prosper every such Attempt to establish and extend the Religion of his Blessed Son for the Sake of the same our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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